



**NTWC**  
National Tribal Water Center

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We strive to protect our water culture, preserve our resources, and prepare for future generations.

## **National Tribal Water Center – Oklahoma Trip Summary (March 1 – 4, 2016)**

### **Project Coyote Water**

#### *Meeting with Indian Health Service (IHS) Oklahoma Area (March 2, 2016)*

The Oklahoma IHS Area Office reported that more than half of the households are connected to and consume water from private wells. This number is roughly based on the field visits by IHS staff. Of the homes connected to the community water system IHS did not report any of the residents using water from an unregulated source when water from the community water system was available. IHS did not report that the residents consuming were known to treat the unregulated water prior to consumption and fewer than half of the households have tested their well water in the past five years. IHS indicated that their State of Oklahoma Health Department does promote well testing and provides educational material. The possible private well water contaminants identified included nitrates (below the regulatory limits), sediment and objectionable taste or odor. IHS reported that the residents were not concerned about water contamination. The initial well testing data that IHS collects following initial installation of the well is managed by IHS in their Housing Inventory Tracking System (HITS) and Sanitation Tracking and Reporting System (STARS). The Oklahoma Water Resource Board, Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) may also have data pertaining to unregulated drinking water.

#### *Meeting with the Chickasaw Nation (March 2, 2016)*

The Chickasaw Nation reported that about half of the households are connected to and consume water from private wells. This number is roughly based on the field experience of the Chickasaw Nation staff. The Nation staff reported that of the homes connected to the community water system it was somewhat common for residents to use unregulated water even when water from the community water system was available. The primary reason for this was to avoid paying a water bill and because it looks cleaner. Water from the community water system contains iron which influences the appearance of the water. The Chickasaw Nation staff did report residents sometimes treat the unregulated water prior to consumption for odor through aeration. The sources of unregulated water consumption in the Chickasaw Nation includes individual wells and surface water. Fewer than half of the private wells have been tested within the past five years and the Nation did not know of any local programs that promote well testing. The private well water contaminants identified included nitrates, bacteria, natural pollution, and objectionable taste or odor (sulfur). The Chickasaw Nation reported that the residents were somewhat or not concerned about water contamination. More than half of the water utilities in the Chickasaw Nation charge for water. To enforce fee collection they use water shut offs, fines, and start up and reconnect fees. The Chickasaw Nation initial well testing data that IHS collects following initial installation of the well is managed by IHS in their HITS and STARS databases. Additional water quality monitoring is completed by the Oklahoma Water Resource Board, Oklahoma DEQ, USGS (pesticides) and EPA.



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### *Meeting with Choctaw Nation Utility and Choctaw EPA (March 3, 2016)*

The Choctaw Nation reported that fewer than half of the households are connected to and consume water from private wells. This number is roughly based on the field experience (23 years) of the Choctaw Nation utility staff. The Nation staff reported that of the homes connected to the community water system it was somewhat common for residents would use unregulated water even when water from the community water system was available. However, this was uncommon and the primary reason for this was cost. The utility staff did report residents treating the unregulated water prior to consumption. The sources of unregulated water consumption in the Choctaw Nation includes individual wells and natural springs. Fewer than half of the private wells have been tested within the past five years and the Nation did not know of any local programs that to promote well testing. The private well water contaminants identified included arsenic, nitrates, bacteria, sediment, natural pollution, and objectionable taste or odor. The Choctaw Nation reported that the residents were somewhat about water contamination. The Choctaw nation was aware of educational outreach activities around water contamination. The Oklahoma DEQ and Tribal EPA were the primary educators. More than half of the water utilities in the Choctaw Nation charge for water. To enforce fee collection they use water shut offs and fines. The Choctaw Nation collects the initial well testing data. The Tribal EPA also have a surface water monitoring program. Additional water quality monitoring is completed by the Oklahoma Water Resource Board, Oklahoma DEQ, and EPA.

### *Meeting with Cherokee Nation Utility Department (March 3, 2016)*

The Cherokee Nation reported that about half of the households are connected to and consume water from private wells. This number is roughly based on the number of service requests and percentage of wells versus utility connections. The Cherokee Nation staff reported that for about half of the homes connected to the community water system it is uncommon for residents to use unregulated water even when water from the community water system was available. The primary reason for this was cost. The sources of unregulated water consumption in the Choctaw Nation includes individual wells and natural springs. Fewer than half of the private wells have been tested within the past five years and the Nation. The actual number was about 200 of 56,000 homes. The Nation did free water testing upon request and the Oklahoma State University (OSU) did provide educational material to residents. The private well water contaminants identified included nitrates, radon, bacteria, sediment, natural pollution, objectionable taste or odor, manganese, iron, and elevated levels of fluoride. The Cherokee Nation reported that the residents were very concerned about water contamination. The Choctaw Nation was aware of educational outreach activities around water contamination which was led by OSU. More than half of the water utilities in the Cherokee Nation charge for water. To enforce fee collection they use water shut offs and reconnection fees. For the utilities that do not enforce shut-offs the primary reasons were community pressure to not shut-off



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residents and lack of staff. The Choctaw Nation collects and manages all of the well testing data. The Tribal EPA has a surface water monitoring program. Additional water quality monitoring is completed by the Oklahoma Water Resource Board, Oklahoma DEQ, and EPA.